

# green hotelier

practical solutions for responsible hospitality

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Large hotel groups are able to put significant resources behind their environmental and corporate social responsibility programmes. However, being smaller can sometimes be an advantage.

## Responsible hospitality

### in independent hotels and smaller chains

**T**here can be no doubt that the corporate social responsibility programmes of large hotel groups have a substantial reach and impact on the local and global environment and upon surrounding communities world-wide. But the collective efforts of smaller scale establishments are no less significant. In fact, in some respects, it is easier for independent accommodation providers and smaller hotel chains to implement environment and social policies.

#### Consider your strengths

In a smaller establishment, decisions such as whether to install energy-efficient lighting, water-saving equipment or even soap and shampoo dispensers can be implemented swiftly and unilaterally by the hotel owner as soon as is practical and affordable. There are few corporate constraints such as the need for branding consistency or co-ordination across the chain. Another advantage is that smaller operators may be more tuned in to the concerns and needs of the community and how best to respond.

The more difficult obstacles for smaller hotels to overcome are the demotivating forces of lack of time and resources and these are often the reasons given for not addressing environmental issues. However, not only can environmental programmes save money, but they can also free up staff time, particularly when it comes to initiatives such as towel and linen programmes. Susan Biemans of the **Bucuti Beach Resort** in Aruba (see case study) says:

"I think the issue for small independent hotels is to educate and motivate those who do not have an environmental programme about how important and simple it is to implement one. We spend a great deal of time on stewardship on Aruba to help solve this issue, both in our industry and for Aruba's residents. There are now eight properties certified as Green Globe 21 in Aruba. None of them are chain-affiliated hotels, they are all individually owned and operated. This applies for the most part throughout the Caribbean - over 60 properties are certified".



#### CASESTUDY Bucuti Beach Resort, Aruba, Dutch Antilles, Caribbean

The approach to management at Aruba's Bucuti Beach Resort is not only to invest in the latest technologies and equipment to help protect the environment, but also to set standards of environmental stewardship that will influence hoteliers in the Caribbean region and beyond.

The resort's environmental ethos is due to the vision of Ewald Biemans, developer, owner and manager of Bucuti, who has always been passionate on the issue, long before it became 'fashionable'. Through his example and leadership, he has instilled his concern for nature and its preservation throughout the organization. Responsible environmental practice is a priority for all staff and they all participate in the programme.

All 58 rooms and five suites at Bucuti Beach are equipped with separate waste bins for recycling, energy saving lamps and water saving toilets, shower heads and taps. All the water used in showers, sinks and baths is collected in the grey water recycling system, irradiated by powerful ultra violet (UV) lamps to eliminate bacteria and then re-used to irrigate the grounds. The gardens are planted with species indigenous to Aruba and are clearly identified for visitors.

The island receives minimal rainfall and all water has to be desalinated from the ocean. Although there is no shortage and the quality is excellent, the desalination process is costly, energy-intensive and the environmental impacts need to be carefully managed, so there are good reasons for not wasting it. Each day, water consumption is logged by the chief engineer on a spreadsheet and calculated against occupancy. Any daily fluctuations in usage can identify a leak or plumbing problem. Water use (including the laundry and the pool) in December 2003 was 484 litres per guest night, compared with 508 litres per guest night in December 1998. All public and back-of-house areas have faucet valves requiring a lever to be activated before water is released to prevent leaks or wastage from leaving the tap running. Waste water from the toilets flows to the government

treatment plant for re-use by businesses and the two golf courses on the island.

Electricity use has been reduced from 23.9 kWh/guest night in December 2003 to 22.1 kWh/guest night in December 2004, due largely to the installation of a new high efficiency air-conditioning unit in the Tara Wing. Similar units are being installed in the main wing and in the offices.

Ewald established an environmental committee within the Aruba Hotel and Tourism Association over ten years ago. Through it, he has enlisted experts to conduct seminars and create other educational opportunities for his colleagues within tourism so they can learn how to be environmentally responsible. He is also a frequent visitor to the Ministry of Tourism where he lobbies government for a dedicated effort to preserve Aruba's environment for future generations by changing and enforcing Aruba's laws.

Beyond the island, Ewald has spoken at environmental conferences and events throughout the Caribbean for the Caribbean Hotel Association and, most recently, for the Dutch Government during a conference in Trinidad and Tobago in 2004. He also sits on the board for the National Park of Aruba which covers 25% of the island.

Winner of many environmental awards, Bucuti Beach Resort is frequently used as a best practice example for other resorts in the Caribbean, including hotels that are part of large chains. Tours of the resort focusing on its environmental programmes are frequently given to staff from other resort hotels in Aruba and groups of students.

Bucuti is a major sponsor of Aruba's Sea Turtle Foundation and Aruba's chapter of Widecast, a network involved in sea turtle protection. The resort also sponsors the island's Reef Care Foundation.

Guests are invited to participate in the resort's water and energy-saving programmes, monthly beach clean-ups, back-of-house tours with green team members and focus group meetings. They regularly send in plaudits expressing their enthusiasm for Bucuti's environmental efforts.

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